Health and Welfare Canada, Medical Services Branch,
August 1979

MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION ON NUTRITION AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION TO MODERNIZE FOOD UTILIZATION SYSTEMS - DRAFT PAPER FOR DISCUSSION

by Jean Steckle, Nutrition Consultant

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2 DRAFT PAPER FOR DISCUSSION

1 MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION ON NUTRITION AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION TO MODERNIZE FOOD UTILIZATION SYSTEMS

The purpose of the study is basically management, to evolve a nutritious food system, valued by the community, derived from available resources. Resources include not only food resources but the entire infrastructure required to deliver, at reasonable cost, a safe tasty nutritious diet. The application of the study is of benefit to all human settlements when the modernization process is promoted and controlled locally through education and training. The application to Northern Canadian communities, particularly native communities in the mid-Canada corridor and in the Arctic, is central to this study.

Food and nutrition problems in the more isolated communities of Canada are severe. The population is increasing and the renewable resources are decreasing. Supplementary food supplies marketed in these areas are from Southern Canada, transported by special air or sea lift. The result has ensured survival but has been damaging to health. A large proportion of native people living in Northern settlements depend on social assistance programs and foods sent in from the South. Mental health is affected when there is little local control of the food system. Physical health has also deteriorated with increasing dependence on high cost, low nutrient convenience foods. There has been an increase in the incidence of dental caries, obesity, skin infections, diabetes, gastrointestinal and metabolic diseases and the abuse of alcohol. Infant bottle feeding in lieu of breast feeding has increased the incidence of upper respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, otitis media, and dental caries in infants.

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Traditional hunting, fishing, local processing and harvesting of berries and certain other forms of vegetation sustained life except when famine occurred during cyclical decline of nomadic herds. Food processing systems maximized the use of solar drying, smoking, freezing and controlled fermentation. Limited storage in the nomadic tradition enhanced concepts of sharing.

A number of government intervetions have helped to alleviate some of the food and nutrition problems but they have not solved it. Social assistance payments have been indexed in most provinces and in the Territories to absorb the extra costs of marketing food in the North. The public and private sectors use similar systems and increase the cost of living allowance to ensure recruits for Northern Development. The government of the NWT has responded to native communities sponsoring pilot land food exchange programs to achieve nutrition objectives. They have also published a resource guide "Northern Nutrition" (1978) to provide assistance in planning community programs. The DIAND has endorsed studies on the cost of food; Medical Services Branch of Health & Welfare has provided vitamin and mineral supplements and promoted nutrition education to improve nutritional status.

Some communities have participated actively in one or other program. A particularly successful program was developed in Pangnirtung by the Hamlet Council and the Health Committee. A Canada Works grant provided the community the opportunity to employ a manager and two assistants to undertake a eight-month nutrition education program to involve residents in making better food choices. Changes in the food order for the sea lift were requested and made through the Hudson Bay Company. Support for basic training and guidance in nutrition education was provided by the Health and Welfare nutritionist and the Home Management Consultant. The hamlet council claims this is the best Canada Works project it has ever implemented. The Baffin Regional Council is actively seeking ways to investigate lower food costs in the North, and the approach used in Pangnirtung is one alternative.

The time seems appropriate to initiate a collective approach, providing information to the community and distributors alike so that better management systems may evolve to ensure at reasonable cost a safe nutritious tasty diet planned and controlled by residents in the small northern settlements.

Plan

1. On-going support (3-5 years) is recommended to enable the Pangnirtung Council to continue nutrition education and the application of science and technology to evolve a reliable nutritious food system.

2. The success of the Pangnirtung nutrition education program needs to be shared; it is recommended the manager of the project in Pangnirtung speak to other hamlet councils and health committees interested in developing a community education and action program. The services of the Home Management Consultant and the Nutritionist in the region are recommended in support of this project.

3. Pond Inlet and Igloolik have requested information to launch their own food and nutrition program. Support for this request is recommended.

4. The instigation of a total system approach needs to overcome
   a) serious health problems. These include:
      - insufficient supplies of food containing sources of vitamin A and vitamin C
      - an over-abundance of food inducing dental caries and obesity
      - high cost of imported staple foods (meat and fish).

   b) wasteful practices in the use of renewable and non-renewable resources.

      An overview is required to:
      - identify principles for the effective use of macro and micro food systems

- manage the interface between micro and macro systems (e.g. imported ingredients vs imported products)
- evaluate weighting mechanisms to determine optimum economic advantages with consumer satisfaction
- choose ecological benefits appropriate to the food system
- select processing technology appropriate to community control.

Availability of staple foods and supplementary foods to meet essential nutrient requirements is given priority. The potential opportunities to modernize traditional systems of solar drying, smoking, freezing, controlled fermentation and concepts of sharing and marketing will be reviewed to achieve modern processing, storage and marketing facilities.

Information, identified by local artisans and trained technologists as useful to the food system will be made available to Hamlet councils and Band councils who wish to use it. A training process and program will be evolved and made available to all northern settlements and communities.

Jean Steckle, Ph.D.
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AUGUST, 1979

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